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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Indonesia: Central Java NU Leader Views on Fundamentalism and Politics

REFS: A) Jakarta 162  
B) 06 Jakarta 13358  
Q C) 06 Jakarta 13303  
Q D) 06 Jakarta 13304

Classified by Pol/Econ Officer David Williams, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

**¶1.** (C) SUMMARY. Consulate General Surabaya met with Muhammad Adnan, Chairman of Central Java Nahdlatul Ulama (CJNU), Central Java's largest Muslim organization, and his deputies on March 2, 2007. Adnan commented that CJNU is less involved in local politics than its East Java counterpart and East Java NU political leaders carry little influence in Central Java. Adnan, influential in the reelection of Hasyim Muzadi as national NU chairman, sees Muzadi's rejection of President Bush's November 2006 visit to Indonesia as a political stab at President Yudhoyono due to lingering animosity from the 2004 campaign. NU membership is shrinking in Jakarta and other large cities with more strict Islamic organizations growing rapidly due to perceptions of NU as old, tired and too liberal by urban youth, according to Adnan. By contrast, he noted that interest in liberalism is on the rise among rural youth in Central Java. Adnan cited secular university students, influenced by conservative Middle Eastern teachings, as a primary member source for growing fundamentalist organizations. In particular, he criticized Islamic hardliners of Arab descent, such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and others for trying to establish an Arab model of Islam in Indonesia. He regretted NU's lack of outreach capacity to counteract these foreign fundamentalist influences. The lack of a counterbalancing moderate voice in secular universities confirms the need to expand outreach programs in this area and presents an opportunity to support publication of moderate Muslim materials for distribution to secular university students. END  
SUMMARY.

Background on Central Java NU

**¶2.** (C) ConGen Surabaya met with Muhammad Adnan, Chairman of Central Java Nahdlatul Ulama (CJNU), and his deputies Abu Hafsin and Hakim on March 2, 2007. All three leaders were comfortable with English, with Hafsin and Hakim having graduated from U.C.L.A. and

McGill University, respectively. With approximately 5 million members, CJNU has the largest membership of any Islamic organization in the province. CJNU is affiliated with 3,300 pesantrens (Islamic schools) at the elementary, junior and senior high school levels, with over 1.6 million students combined. CJNU has over 1 million members in its Muslim women's organization and an equal number participating in boys' and girls' youth groups active in community service and charitable endeavors. CJNU also sponsors a monthly interfaith dialog for Central Java religious leaders. Adnan told us that CJNU is loosely connected to the National Awakening political party (PKB) but does not actively participate in local or national politics. He feels CJNU wields influence through its ability to mobilize masses of loyal members in support of a cause.

#### Politics and NU

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¶3. (C) Adnan reports that CJNU is much less politically involved than its larger East Java counterpart. Ali Maschan Moesa's East Java political aspirations (Ref A) were a topic of discussion. Adnan stated that he does not aspire to high political office in Central Java and was mildly critical of Ali Maschan's desire to become East Java's governor in ¶2008. He added that both former president Abdurahman Wahid (Gus Dur), head of the PKB, and Choiral Anam, head of the break-away National Cleric Awakening Party (PKNU), while powerful forces in East Java politics (Ref D), hold little political influence in Central Java. "Gus Dur gets his energy from conflict. He

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created the PKB conflict among party elites as a source of power. Ordinary people here are unaware and unconcerned, with little interest in the PKNU or the conflict," according to Adnan. Adnan reiterated the importance of NU as a purely social organization, remaining separate from politics.

¶4. (C) When discussing the political aspirations of Hasyim Muzadi, former vice presidential candidate and the national head of NU, Hakim was vehement that Muzadi may not run for office in 2009 because he signed a contract with NU prohibiting his running for public office as a condition to his reelection as national chairman. Adnan pragmatically stated, "It is true Muzadi can not run for office. However, if he were appointed as a candidate by a party without running, I think we could not stop him." (Note: Adnan, a close ally of Muzadi, chaired the 2004 NU national conference and played an important role in reelecting Muzadi as NU's national leader after his failed vice presidential run. End Note.) Muzadi's public statements refusing to meet with President Bush during his November 2006 (although such an invitation was never offered) was a domestic political stab at President Yudhoyono, Muzadi's rival in the 2004 presidential election, according to Adnan. When President Bush came to Bali in 2003, Muzadi was eager to meet him because at that time Megawati was the president. Adnan said that there is significant personal animosity between Muzadi and SBY resulting from the campaign.

#### Conservatism Inside NU

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¶5. (C) NU membership is shrinking in Jakarta with more strict Islamic organizations growing rapidly. According to Adnan, "NU popularity in Jakarta and other cities is declining because NU neglects Islamic symbolism (such as strict Islamic dress). Urban

Muslims see NU as old, tired, liberal and from the village, more a social organization than an Islamic organization. They are attracted to fundamentalism and stricter Islamic organizations because they are perceived as new, modern, powerful and intellectual." Adnan added that Gus Dur is a polarizing figure in NU: "rural people love him, worship him like a saint, as a man close to God. Urban Muslims see him as too liberal and, at best, out of touch with Islamic values." Adnan sees Muzadi's close ties to strict Muslim organizations such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) led by Habib Rizieq and Laskar Jihad (LJ) led by Ja'far Umar Thalib as a means of increasing NU's appeal to urban Muslims by directing NU's image more toward the center. Adnan believes Muzadi's goal is to "mentor" fundamentalist leaders on how to live in a modern, pluralistic and multicultural society while upholding strict Islamic laws and values. (Note: We doubt that Muzadi is that naQve. He is, however, that ambitious i.e., he is willing to align himself and NU with fringe groups if it suits his political goals. End Note.)

¶16. (C) While urban Muslims are growing more conservative, Adnan stated, rural Muslims are becoming more liberal. Adnan and his deputies asserted that fundamentalism, especially among rural youth, is rapidly falling out of fashion and being replaced by Islam Liberal. They see increasing interest in liberalism as a recent but strong trend not only in their schools but throughout the rural areas of Central Java. This trend was also mentioned in a February 13 ConGen discussion with Askuri, a Yogyakarta-based Muhammadiyah education consultant and 2006 International Visitor Program grantee. Askuri commented that interest in fundamentalism among students at Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah schools is waning. Askuri sees pluralistic and multicultural attitudes returning to favor around the Yogyakarta region as a result of the May 2006 earthquake and a pulling together of local communities in response to the damage and suffering it caused. Many students were intimately involved in volunteering to help rebuild destroyed homes throughout the Yogyakarta region.

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Askuri thought that the students' experiences in the villages softened some of their hard-line ideas about Islam.

#### Fundamentalism in Indonesia

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¶17. (C) Adnan had an interesting take on the sources of fundamentalism in Indonesia. "If we look carefully, many young fanatic Muslims come from secular universities such as Gajah Mada, Airlangga, Diponegoro and ITB. Followers of HTI or FPI come from those secular universities. Very few come from the IAIN or UIN state Islamic universities," according to Adnan. He reasons that students from secular universities tend to learn Islam from a "scientific" or "intellectual" approach. He added, "Secular university students are trained to interpret the Qur'an in terms of black and white or good and evil. They read the Qur'an and try to apply it literally. While in Islamic universities, most of the students have already had some madrasah/pesantren educational background before they enter. They have knowledge on how to intuitively understand and interpret the Qur'an, leaving room for the 'gray' God also created." He said that learning Islam through an intellectual approach is faster and easier, appealing to urban dwellers living in a fast paced society. Understanding Islam through an intuitive approach is slow and difficult, lending itself to slower pace of rural life. Hafsin thought

that the current globalization trend is causing young urban Muslims in secular universities to feel the need to "protect" themselves from the influence of Western/popular culture by showing off their Muslim identity more strongly. Hafsin reasoned that students at Islamic universities do not feel conflicted between pop/Western culture and Islamic culture because by attending an Islamic university they are already protected.

¶8. (C) The teachings that are influencing young fanatic Muslims are coming from outside Indonesia, according to Adnan. He sees Saudi Arabia (Wahabbis), Egypt, Lebanon and Iran as primary sources of materials, and especially funding, to fundamentalist groups inside Indonesia. He added, "We encounter many well-financed Islamic groups proselytizing in urban areas, less so in rural areas. Fundamentalism in Indonesia is the biggest threat to NU." He said that NU has no capabilities to produce adequate and attractive information on Islamic teachings. NU does not produce magazines, books or a youth-oriented newspaper for distribution to university students. They tend to focus only on their own community. NU clerics frown on "modern" methods of disseminating information as they require translations from Arabic scripture, which they oppose. Adnan admits holding to traditional ways is a primary reason young and urban Muslims considered NU as an old fashioned Islamic organization. He regrets students receive reams of free publications from Iran, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon without hearing a moderate Indonesian voice from NU. (Note: NU's student wing has received a grant from PAS Jakarta to combat extremism among university students, focusing on fostering discussion and sponsoring websites. This is the type of program which could potentially be expanded to include moderate publications. End Note.)

Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in Central Java

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¶9. (C) When discussing NU's relationship with Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (ABB) and his Ngruki pesantren in Central Java, Adnan clearly stated, "We have no relationship with ABB or Ngruki. We mostly leave each other alone." Adnan described ABB as a "textualist" and that their philosophies "could not be more different". He commented that most Islamic hardliners such as ABB, Jafar Thalib and Habib Rizieq are Indonesian of Arab descent, trying to establish an Arab model of Islam in Indonesia. This is contradictory with NU's objective of maintaining an Indonesian (read Javanese) Islamic society. Adnan

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also was visibly disturbed that ABB had issued a "fatwah" (Islamic ruling) to his followers that NU members were "kafir" or non-Muslim. When ABB was recently in the hospital for a heart ailment, CJNU had a high-level internal debate as to whether the head of NU in Solo should visit ABB's hospital room. "Since we are not Muslim, we thought that maybe our representative would not be welcome," Adnan added wryly.

Comment

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¶10. (C) Our meeting with Adnan and his deputies highlighted a number of differences between CJNU and East Java NU's leadership. CJNU's strong support for Muzadi and some of his more controversial affiliations contrasts sharply with East Java NU's private condemnation of Muzadi's close and public ties to fundamentalist Muslim leaders. Unlike East Java NU

leaders who advocate reform and modernization of NU in order to appeal to younger and urban Muslims, CJNU leaders seemed comfortable with NU sticking to its rural roots and traditional methods. The Central and East Java NU branches reflect the cultural reputations of the two provinces; Central Java, quiet and polite and East Java, vocal and aggressive.

¶11. (C) At first glance, CJNU leader's statements on secular university students as more conservative than Islamic university students may seem counterintuitive. However, in our many visits to the major secular universities in the two provinces, the conservative attitudes among students, including the adoption of Islamic dress, is striking. The lack of a counterbalancing moderate voice in secular universities is further confirmation of the need to expand programs in this area and presents an ideal opportunity to support publication of moderate Muslim materials for distribution to secular university students.

PIERANGELO/HEFFERN